

# ***Using Alcohol Safely During Holidays and Special Events***

Holidays and special events seem like natural opportunities to indulge in a few drinks, even if you don't normally drink alcohol. Even if you don't buy alcoholic beverages yourself, they'll probably be offered to you frequently during holiday periods. Here are some safety facts to consider before you raise your glass.

## **Alternatives to Drinking Alcohol**

Don't make drinking the main focus of your holiday partying. If you're the host, provide plenty of tempting and nutritious nonalcoholic foods and drinks. Starchy foods, such as pizza, stuffed potatoes and cheese and crackers, and such drinks as juice, soda and nonalcoholic punch are ideal. If you're a guest, concentrate on consuming these goodies rather than alcohol. Set a limit on how much you will drink and stick to it. Never force drinks on another guest or feel you have to drink alcohol to "get in the mood." Don't drink punch or eggnog without asking if they are spiked with liquor; if they are, drink the plain versions instead. As the host, close the bar at least an hour before the end of the party, even if you have to hide the liquor from guests.

## **Driving Out of Control**

One of the dangers of alcohol is that you may think you're in control of your driving, but you're not. If you're a habitual drinker, you may not feel drunk after a few drinks, but your blood-alcohol level will show that you are. If friends tell you that you shouldn't drive, listen to them. Better yet, go out with a designated driver. You'll thank them when you've sobered up. Having as few as three or four drinks can double your chances of being in an accident. After seven or eight drinks, those odds increase 25 times.

## **Identifying Intoxicated Drivers**

Even if you leave a party sober, you have to be especially cautious around holidays and other periods when parties proliferate, such as Super Bowl Sunday or St. Patrick's Day. It helps to be able to identify drunk drivers so that you can steer clear of them with room, and time, to spare. Here are some clues to help you identify someone who's driving under the influence of alcohol:

1. Weaving, swerving or driving with tires on the lane marker;
2. Very slow or very fast speeds;
3. Inconsistent signaling;
4. Erratic braking or stopping without apparent cause;
5. Nearly striking an object or vehicle;
6. Driving with his or her head out the window or with the window down in cold weather;
7. Driving into oncoming or crossing traffic; and/or
8. Driving in the dark with headlights off.

## **Time Is the Only Cure**

How soon after drinking is it safe to drive? The answer depends on how much you weigh, how much you've had to eat and how your body handles alcohol. On average, your body needs at least one hour for each drink you've had, to process and get rid of the alcohol. There's no other way to do it: black coffee won't do it, and neither will a cold shower or other so-called remedies. Only time will make you sober enough to drive. Knowing this, plan ahead to take public transportation or a taxi or to have a sober friend or relative give you a ride to and from holiday festivities. You can also ask your host if you may stay overnight.

## **Did You Know?**

Twelve ounces of beer, one-and-a-half ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits and five ounces of wine all have:

- The same amount of alcohol;
- The same effects on the body;
- The same sobering-up time: at least one hour per drink; and
- The same penalty for drunk driving, whether the drink is beer, wine or hard liquor.

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